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# THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

## WOOD CARVING, ADAPTED FOR BOTH THE AMATEUR AND THE PROFESSIONAL.

BY W. N. BROWN,

Author of "Wood Turning for Amateurs," "Working in Brass," "The Arch, Vault and Dome," "The Ancient Ecclesiastical Wood Work of England," "The History of Decorative Art," "A Manual of Wood Engraving," etc., etc.

### CHAPTER II.

#### WOODS AND MODELING.

AS NOTED at the end of the preceding chapter I shall now glance briefly at the most important portion of my subject—namely wood. For large subjects, such as ecclesiastical fittings, reredos, choir stalls, sideboards, buffets and such like heavy pieces, oak is undoubtedly the best, and in former times most of the wood carving, especially in England, whose country seats and abbeys are particularly rich in choice specimens, was executed in this essentially national timber; but for small work ebony or box is to be preferred. A good deal of carving is also accomplished in mahogany, and Grinling Gibbons executed some very fine work in it. Hard wood, well seasoned, must, of course, be selected, soft timber being simply next to useless, and a few hints as to selection may not be out of place here. Thus American or Norwegian oak is much to be preferred to the English on account of its freedom from knots, but Austrian walnut is even better still. The longer all timber is kept the better, and, where possible, a large supply should be laid in and stacked in a dry place, as the value of all timber used in carved work much improves with time. Although it must be kept dry, it must, when required for use, be gradually exposed to the light, but always under cover, while on no account must it be exposed to the sunlight or the rain, as considerable damage will ensue. In ebony a flaw in the wood is readily detected by a thin white line. As this wood is very expensive, if the flaw is not a very serious one, it can be remedied by pouring into the crack some thin glue, which allow to harden, clamping the wood tightly the while. But generally it will be found better to throw the wood on one side. Unseasoned wood can be very readily detected by the peculiarly unpleasant and sour odor which it throws off, especially when cut, and this is the more noticeable with oak, which needs at least four years to render it seasonable and fit for use for carving purposes. With these few general remarks upon the selection of timber, I shall pass on to modeling—without a knowledge of which no wood carver can hope to succeed in his handicraft.

I would earnestly impress upon the carver—especially if he be, what he should be, an art student, the necessity of devoting a short time to the acquirement of the art of modeling in clay, having acquired which his progress will be both rapid and satisfactory. When carving from a design, the operator will have only the outlines as a rule to work from, but if he starts with clay, his work will be much easier. Thus, his material is not only very plastic and easy to manipulate, but he can add to or decrease from the pattern as may be necessary or fancy may dictate, while in wood, if he inadvertently chips a piece off, it cannot be restored, which if the subject is somewhat advanced, is a serious matter, whereas in clay the work can be readily patched up, and the result noted before advancing with the carving. The necessity of acquiring a knowledge of modeling will then be apparent to the dullest of intellects. The plant required is neither extensive nor expensive, while many of the tools can be readily made by anyone. Modeling clay can be purchased at most plaster modelers or artists' color stores in the cities, and at these can also generally be procured the necessary

tools, which are made of wood, bone, and even iron.

The first of the "plant" necessary will be a steady table or bench, at which the operator will work. A fairly thick board, perfectly smooth, is a capital basis on which to work, while some operators elect to have the board inclined desk fashion—this much depends, however, upon the nature of

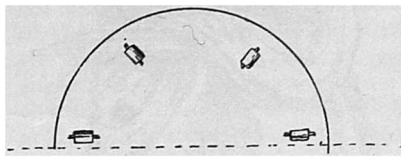


Fig. 7.  
Showing Rollers.

the work in hand, and where the latter plan is adopted, and the work is at all large, it is advisable to have the board pro-

vided with a few vertical pegs, with which to hold the clay while being manipulated. This applies, of course, to modeling on the flat or low relief.

For modeling in the "round"—that is, detached figures, busts, etc.—it is best to procure a "modeling stool" or stand, such as shown at figure 6. This consists of a tripod frame, with a turntable or revolving top. This top is made of a couple of pieces of stout and well seasoned wood, placed one above the other, and so arranged that the uppermost piece turns upon a central pivot fixed in the lower piece, and protruding through the upper, as shown in the sketch (figure 6). This allows of the work being turned about as the modeling proceeds—a great convenience in modeling in the round. It is also advisable to fix six or eight hard wood rollers, rather smaller in size than the rollers of small furniture casters, arranged circularly on the under side of the upper board or the top side of the under stationary board, as shown at figure 7, which permits of the upper board being easily rotated when the clay in process of manipulation is at all heavy. It is not at all unlikely that the constant contact of the moist clay with the top board will cause it in time to become warped, and thus rendered useless. This eventuality can be obviated by constructing the top board of two well seasoned pieces of flat wood, truly planed up, and then well screwed together with the run of the grain in one piece at right angles to that in the other, when no trouble from warping will ensue.

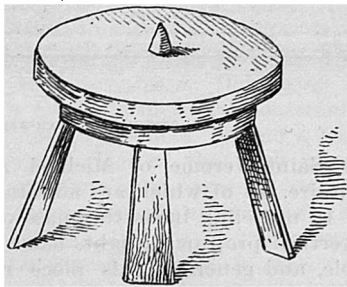


Fig. 6.  
Modelling Stand.

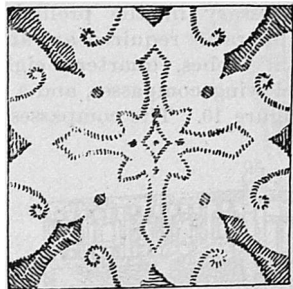
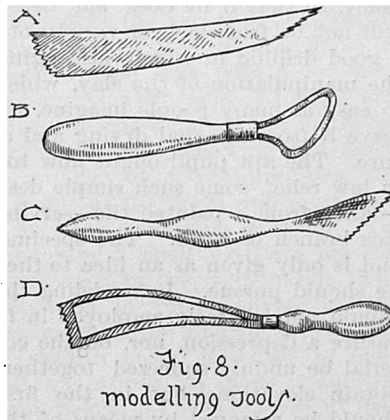


Fig. 9.  
Simple Tile in Low Relief.

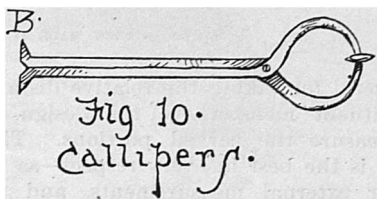
edges on each working portion, B is utilized for reducing outlines and for the making of grooves, C is for finishing the work, and D is also a finisher much recommended.

Clay is, of course, the material employed, and as I before stated, can be purchased in towns, but in the country will generally be procurable for the trouble of fetching. Very fair clay can be procured from those potteries where rough ware—such as tiles, flower pots, etc.—is manufactured, and the light clay is preferable to the dark, as the shadows are better worked, and the work shown up in greater prominence and effect. As a rule the clay will be procured in a humid and ductile condition, and it should be kept well, but not too, moist. If it is dry and hard when purchased, it should be broken up into small pieces, and sprinkled with water, then left to gradually moisten, and now and then stirred up until it is all equally moistened, when it should be well beaten. It should neither be too wet nor too stiff when used, and the proper condition will be only acquired by practice. Should it be too stiff it must be slightly moistened; if on the other hand it should be too damp, a little finely powdered clay should be carefully incorporated with it, and the whole then thoroughly kneaded up.

The best exercises for the beginner are simple geometrical forms, this being advisable for the purpose of accustoming the pupil to the handling of the clay and the acquiring and the improving of his knowledge of form, and for this purpose he should place a small portion of the clay upon the modeling stand and then, principally with the fingers, proceed with the modeling of various geometrical figures, at first simple, and then complicated, also increasing the relief as proficiency is attained. These designs must be built up piecemeal, and in these figures, which should be extensively



In some descriptions of modeling the fingers can do a great deal, but in any case a few modeling tools should be either purchased or made. The forms of a few of these are shown at figure 8, and they can all be made by means of a sharp pocket knife and file and some sticks of hard wood, such as box, which with bone, are the materials generally employed, the handles of tooth brushes offering good material. In the illustration A is a capital implement for roughing out and other preparatory processes, the tool being furnished with jagged

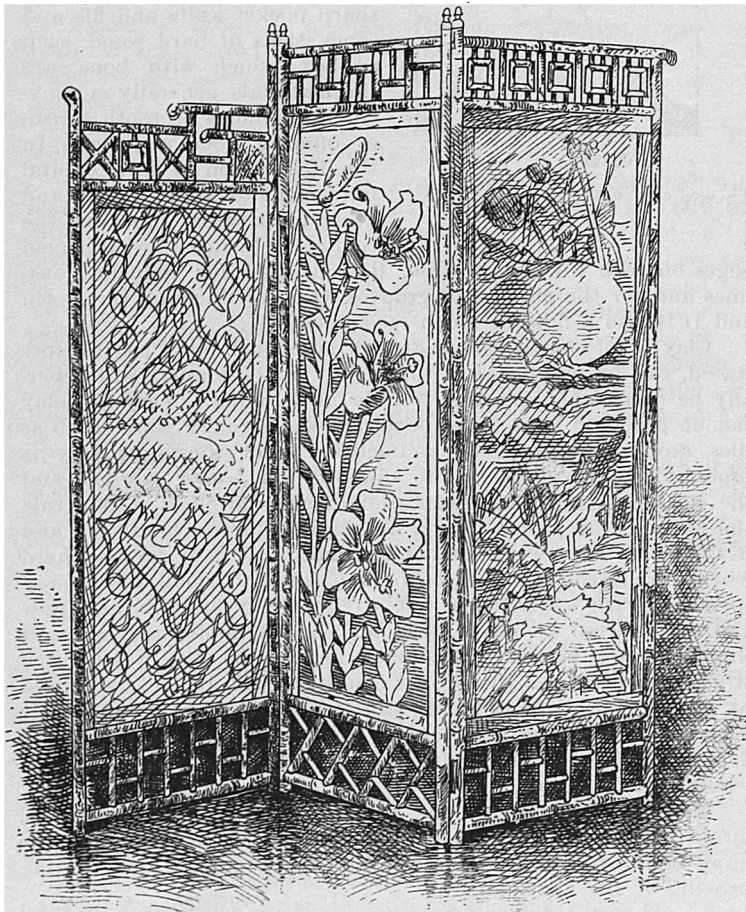


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practised before more complex subjects are entered upon, the small tool shown at C in figure 8 will be found particularly handy. The student should then pass on to simple forms of plant life, such as leaves and sprays, singly and then in combination, and this branch will offer an unlimited scope to the artist's fancy, so that if he does not become a professional modeler, it will not be from lack or variety of studies, having given himself a good drilling in which he ought to be tolerably proficient in the manipulation of the clay, which, though simple, is not quite so easy as many people imagine, one great trouble being to preserve it from unequal drying and consequent cracking and fracture. The apt pupil ought now to venture upon medallion work in low relief, some such simple design as that shown at figure 9—taken from a painted tile—serving as a good introduction to this branch of work. The specimen given is a very simple one, and is only given as an idea to the student respecting the method he should pursue. In modeling this tile in low relief the fingers should not be freely employed in forcing the clay down so as to ensure a depression, nor, on the converse, should the plastic material be unduly squeezed together with the hands in order to obtain elevations, but in the first place the superfluous clay should be removed by means of the tool shown at C in figure 8, and in the second instance fresh bits—small—of clay should be added by means of the same tool and lightly beaten down, and afterwards formed up to the correct outline. Take care to finish the work neatly, and to have the relief—be it high or low—uniform. This branch of modeling should be practised for some considerable time, the operator going gradually from works in very low relief to those in very high and much “undercut,” finally passing into the “round,” having attained to which he can proceed with wood carving proper.

These preliminary studies being completed, the student may venture upon a model of the human mouth, for which a plaster cast will have to be procured to serve as a copy, following it up with the human eye and ear, all of which should be copied several times—at first large, and then gradually reducing the proportions until a thorough proficiency has been acquired.

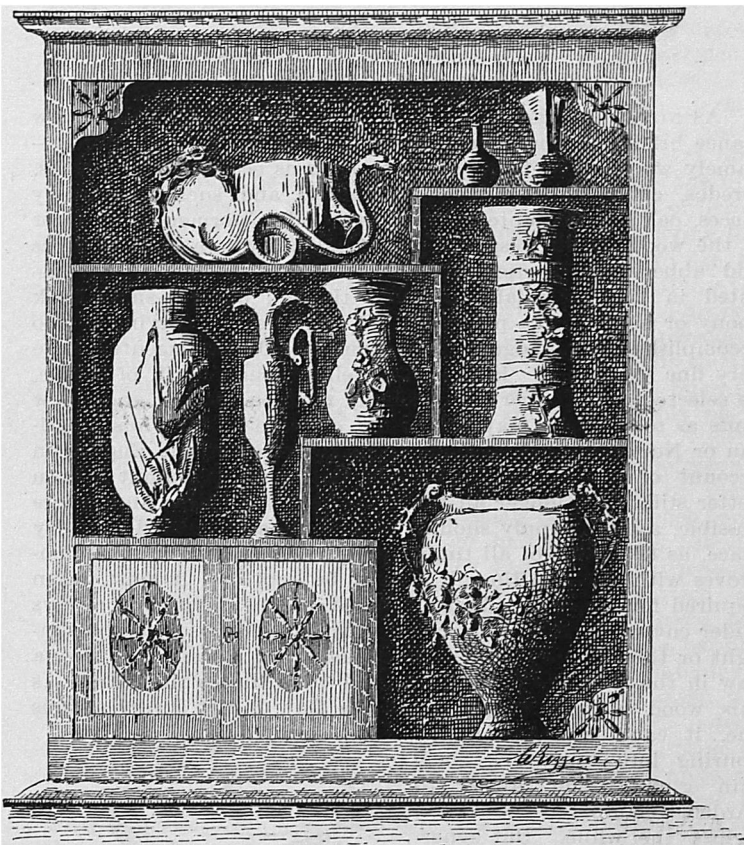
After this period the student should see to the verifying of his work, which was really not necessary in the preliminary stages. For this verification the apparatus required are an ordinary foot rule, duly worked off in inches, quarters, eighths and sixteenths, a pair of iron or steel wing compasses, and a pair of callipers, of the shape shown at figure 10. The compasses are



BAMBOO SCREEN, MADE BY J. E. WALL, BOSTON.

useful for taking the relative distances between the several constituent members of the design, while the callipers serve to measure the carved portions. The description shown at figure 10 is the best in every respect—as the end A can be employed for external measurements, and that at B for internal. The student should now undertake more ambitious work, such as the modeling of masks or busts—the former, for preference, first. In this, in which the face only is represented, the clay can be laid

down flat upon the surface of the modeling table; but for busts a larger mass of clay would be needed, the whole of the head and neck being modeled. Copies of most of the celebrated statues and faces of antiquity can be readily obtained, and good examples will be the mask of the Venus de Milo (the original of which is in the Louvre at Paris), the Madonna of Michael Angelo, the daughters of Niobe, the Belvidere Apollo, the head of Ajax,



DESIGN FOR OVER-MANTEL, BY C. RIZZINI.

the Saint Jerome of Michael Angelo, David, Shakespeare and Voltaire, all of which are admirable studies for modeling.

In modeling busts the mass of clay needs to be supported by a vertical prop or upright, fixed to the centre of the modeling table, and generally this piece requires to have another piece horizontally fixed to it as an extra support. Sufficient of the clay must now be taken to form the foundation of the bust, and should be carefully built up around the upright support, and then well beaten down with a small stick or, for preference, a small flat bat, until the clay has been rendered completely homogeneous. To this central nucleus portions of clay must be added from time to time as the work proceeds, and it will therefore be understood that the bust is not carved out of a solid block of soft clay, but built up gradually into the rough form of the work desired, taking care to beat the ductile mass thoroughly and frequently. When this has been properly done, the whole of the work must be gone over with the roughing tool shown at A in figure 8, scraping away and removing all those portions of the clay which appears to be superabundant, and of course spreading more over those places which are not in sufficient relief. In the course of working it will be found that the clay adheres very much to the tools, and these must be constantly cleaned, or fine, cleanly cut work will never be accomplished, cleanliness being as necessary in clay modeling as in most other art handicrafts. The surface of the bust must then be again gone over with the other tools, all defects remedied, and the whole brought up to the proper smoothness.

In this portion of the work I would recommend great care and patience, as from the care which is taken over this finishing process



A DRAPED EASEL.



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much of the work will depend, while the habits of exactitude acquired in modeling will stand the workman in good stead while carving in the wood. In the clay, the hair will call for much attention, the lines of which should be broken and irregular, and here the copper wire tools will be found exceedingly useful, as the appearance of waviness is rather difficult to acquire, the first result of the amateur usually resulting in a stringy set of streaks. If preferred, the pupils of the eyes may be marked by striking a couple of small circles with the compasses or a piece of small tube, though the pupils are not struck, as a rule, unless the bust, mask or group refers to a modern day portrait or subject—those copied from the classical periods being generally left blank.

With those few instructions and plenty of practice—upon which, for the beginner particularly, I must strongly insist—the would be wood carver should master the preliminary task, and I would impress upon the worker the necessity of keeping his tools thoroughly clean, his clay well moist, and with his work, covered up with a wet cloth, whenever he should not be at work upon it. With this closing injunction, I shall quit the necessary subject of modeling, and in my next commence that of Wood Carving proper, proceeding with preliminary studies.

### OLD LONDON.

**I** CONOCLASTIC as we Americans may be and prone to ignore the claims of antiquity and the antique, we have yet a vein of romance in our character and succumb readily to whatever may turn our minds to romantic thoughts. Our disposition to replace the old with the new comes from our realization that the new meets our requirements much more fully than the old, rather than from any disposition to destroy, and when we come into direct contact with a remnant of an earlier century we admire and enjoy it.

The by gone days of London and Paris are especially interesting to us, for one reason that the modern cities are well known to Americans generally, and for the other reason that their history as cities is more familiar to the majority of our people than that of any other of the large cities of the world.

This interest of ours in such reminiscences is illustrated by the success of the Olde London Street, which was constructed a few months ago in New York, and reproduces, behind a front wall showing Bishopsgate to the life, some of the most prominent of early London houses, houses that have earned distinction either by their own constructive attractiveness, by incidents that occurred in their existence, or by the celebrity of the persons who lived in them. There is the house of Isaac Walton, who has done so much to endanger the life of fish and add to the enjoyment of the angler, who found an esthetic phase to hook and line; near it is Grub Street, a congregation of cheap restaurants, where old Dr. Johnson, partly from necessity and largely from choice, found the means of economically gratifying his enormous appetite; the East India House looks as it did when Charles Lamb made his living in it grinding his brilliant intellect on the rough edges of ledgers and the like; the Devil's Tavern is as "Rare Ben Jonson" found it, and wherein he and his merry companions, Shakespeare among them, made half the witticisms that pass current to-day as novelties; there is the Gunpowder Plot House, sombre and suggestive of conspiracy; the Falcon Tavern, and the favorite resort of Shakespeare, where he no doubt found many opportunities to "drown his sorrow;" Sir Richard Whittington's house, and that of Oliver Cromwell, besides such a host of other interesting things are here, that one visit can hardly suffice to see them all.

### A BEAUTIFUL PRIZE CUP.

**T**HE illustration which we give of the beautiful cup just made by the Meriden Britannia Company in a measure fails to represent it, for the reason that the rich combinations of metallic colors can not be reproduced in a black and white sketch, but aside from this our artist has succeeded in making a very happy likeness. The cup proper stands thirty-six inches high, or with the pedestal, forty-eight. The elaborate cover alone is over twenty-three inches high, and the diameter of the bowl eighteen inches, increased to twenty-four inches if the handles are included. It rests upon four open-work feet of silver and gold, wrought out in a design somewhat Egyptian in character. The base of silver is bordered with a fluting of bright gold, giving a very deep rich effect to this part.

The burnished silver stem has applied upon each side laurel wreaths of dead gold and in front a circular medallion in which is a photograph of the donor, Mr. Richard K. Fox. Upon the upper border of a somewhat shallow bowl and surrounding its entire circumference, is a representation of a harbor view. This is in low relief and one of the artistic features of the piece. Here are seen numerous yachts and other sea craft, each with hulls of gold and sails of silver, standing out against a golden

sky. Upon the shore are crowded the buildings of a large city, represented in oxydized work, and forming a luxurious contrast with the silver and gold which predominate in other portions of the scene.

The lower edge of the cover is bordered with a gold ornamentation resembling a style of work very popular during the seventeenth century, and designated by the artists of that period as "egg and tongue" decoration. Above this rises a dome of burnished silver, ornamented upon each side with a design of silver satin-work, relieved with engravings in gold of foliage, etc. Between these designs and in front of the dome is an engraved representation of a spirited single scull race, showing the finish and in the background a vast number of spectators upon the grand stand. This engraving is one of the finest and most realistic pieces of workmanship we have ever seen in metal. On either side of the dome and occupying a small platform are statuettes of oarsmen holding a boat-hook in the right hand. The flesh of these figures is represented in bronze silver, like the color which exposure to the sun gives to the human skin. The rowing costumes are of a dark reddish color, the hose of deep gold and the shoes oxydized black. Above the dome is another border of gold matching the one below. The top which rises from this part is vase shaped and of burnished silver. On either side protrudes the head of a fox of dead gold and a little above these upon the front and back are golden oars and American flags, showing the colors, crossed and held by laurel wreaths of gold. The whole is surmounted with a statuette of a fox in gold upon a burnished silver platform. The pedestal is of steel-finish, relieved with bands of gold.



PRIZE CUP, MADE BY THE MERIDEN BRITANNIA CO.